

# Cudahy Health Department



***“SOMEBODY must stand guard over the health of all citizens.  
SOMEBODY must prevent and control communicable disease.  
SOMEBODY must spread the word about how to keep health.***

***THAT SOMEBODY IS THE CUDAHY HEALTH DEPARTMENT.”***

This statement was used in a 1948 - 1951 Cudahy Health Department summary of activities.

The chronicle of the Cudahy Health Department begins in 1895 when the first committee on Fire, Water and Health was appointed by the Village of Cudahy. George Long was named the first Cudahy Health Commissioner for the Village. At that time, prevention and control of communicable disease was the primary public health endeavor. Smallpox epidemics were the first targets. In 1905, Dr. E. M. Sidler provided the first written report of the incidence of smallpox cases, the diagnosis of those cases and a legal opinion of the Village Attorney.

In 1914, the City of Cudahy obtained its health services through the jurisdiction of the Board of Education who hired Dr. Bernard Krueger to visit Cudahy schools on a daily basis. Dr. Krueger's role was to control epidemics, to administer first aid, to investigate accidents and to provide physical examinations for school children.

## **Cudahy Health Commissioners:**

Dr. George Long	1895
Dr. Joseph Posthauer	1896
Dr. A.C. Sidler	1897
Dr. E.M. Sidler	1906
Dr. B. Krueger	1910
Dr. E.M. Sidler	1912
Dr. B.F. Palmer	1916
Dr. E.X. Thompson	1920
Dr. Edgar Strandt	1924
Dr. S.H. Kash	1926
Dr. B. Kreuger	1932
Dr. S.H. Kash	1935
Dr. C.Chelius	1960
Carol Wantuch, BSN, MS	1991
Dr. T.H. Kowalski, Medical Advisor	1991



**Camille Prondzinski, Dr. Chelius, and  
Gerald Ponec in 1969**

Over the years, the City of Cudahy has had 12 Health Commissioner/Health Officers. The majority of these individuals were practicing physicians. Prior to 1910, the City's Health Officer was appointed by a committee on health. During the next 20 years, this position was made elective. Since

1930, the Health Commissioner/Health Officer has been appointed by the Cudahy Board of Health with the approval of the Cudahy Common Council.

No story about the history of the Cudahy Health Department would be complete without discussing the devotion of the Public Health Nurses. In 1920, a school nurse was hired to assist the Health Officer with his responsibilities. That year the first nutrition program for underweight school children was initiated and financed by the sale of Christmas Seals. In 1921, the Cudahy Common Council asked the City Attorney to draw up an ordinance creating the office of Community or City Nurse. The first Health Department budget was a mere \$2,600.00!

By 1937, two Public Health Nurses made daily visits to each of nine Cudahy schools to do vision screenings, first aid, assist the Health Officer with physical exams, and provide health education for students and parents. Other Public Health Nursing duties included “home visits for communicable disease, supervision of quarantined homes and weekly clinics for prevention and Child Health conferences.” Even policemen sold Christmas Seals on their beats. As time went on, more Public Health Nurses were hired. Their duties expanded beyond school nursing and communicable disease control and follow-up to include regular child health conferences, weekly immunization clinics, home visits to new infants and mothers, visits to preschool children and care of special health care needs children.

*At right:*

**A 1976 Cudahy Health Department Staff Meeting**

*Left to right:*

**Susan Martinek, Deputy Registrar; Judith Rausch, PHN; Josephine Smith, PHN; Jeannette Knurr, Jr. PHN; Janice Krause, LPH, Ruth Miller, PHN; Camille Prondzinski, PHN Supervisor**



In 1993, because of budgetary concerns, Public Health Nurses began functioning primarily as consultants to the School District and to the Health Aides who replaced the nurses in schools. Initially, there were many concerns about this change in responsibilities. However over time, Cudahy Public Health Nurses’ activities expanded to include making visits, providing case management for individual clients as well as assessing community health needs and participating in prevention and preparedness activities.

Today’s Public Health Nurses plan for improving the health of the community and protecting the health of our clients through a vast array of services ranging from communicable disease control to preventing blood lead poisoning in children.



**Robert Harris Wisconsin Division of Health presenting the Level 3 Certification to Gerald Ponec, Board of Health Chairman and Carol Wantuch, Health Officer**

In spring of 2005, the Cudahy Health Department was designated as a Level 3 Public Health Agency (the highest level of service) by the Wisconsin Division of Health. This is an affirmation of the dedicated and competent services that are provided by the Cudahy Health Department.



**1978 Influenza Clinic**

From the days of the “pest house,” located on Squire and Kingan Avenue where contagious residents were quarantined, control and prevention of communicable disease has been the primary role of the Health Department. Over the past 100 years, the City has weathered outbreaks of smallpox, tuberculosis, polio, rubella (German measles), diphtheria, syphilis, the Spanish and Asian flu pandemics and Pertussis (whooping cough).

Today, the Health Department continues to combat Pertussis, sexually transmitted infections, and tuberculosis. The Health Department is also faced with new diseases that were unknown in the early 1900’s, such as West Nile Virus, SARS (Sudden Acute Respiratory Syndrome), and biologic agents of terrorism, including smallpox and anthrax as well as the possibility of another pandemic flu outbreak.

One of the most efficient ways to protect our community against communicable diseases is through immunization. In 1922, “free (smallpox) vaccinations to those who deserve it” were ordered by the Cudahy Common Council. By 1948, only two vaccines, smallpox and DTP (Diphtheria – Tetanus – Pertussis) were available to the public.

In 1976, the State of Wisconsin enacted HFS 144, the Immunization Checkpoint Law. This law specified minimum immunization requirements for first time admission to a Wisconsin elementary schools or day care centers. At that time, 75.3% of school children had received age-appropriate immunizations. In 2004, 98.95% of Cudahy’s school children are up to date on their age-appropriate immunizations. Today’s children routinely receive 23 doses of vaccine!

<u><b>Immunizations</b></u>	
<u><b>Vaccine:</b></u>	<u><b>Available In:</b></u>
<b>DTP (Diphtheria – Tetanus –Pertussis)</b>	<b>1947</b>
<b>Salk Polio (Injectable)</b>	<b>1955</b>
<b>Sabin Polio (Oral)</b>	<b>1956</b>
<b>Measles</b>	<b>1965</b>
<b>Rubella (German Measles)</b>	<b>1969</b>
<b>Measles – Rubella</b>	<b>1971</b>
<b>Mumps</b>	<b>1974</b>
<b>Measles – Mumps – Rubella</b>	<b>1978</b>
<b>Hepatitis B</b>	<b>1990</b>
<b>Hib (Haemophilus influenzae B)</b>	<b>1991</b>
<b>Varicella (Chicken Pox)</b>	<b>1999</b>
<b>DTaP</b>	<b>2000</b>
<b>(Diphtheria – Tetanus – Acellular Pertussis)</b>	
<b>Pneumococcal Conjugate</b>	<b>2000</b>

Another important health need that was identified in 1937 Cudahy was sanitation. The Cudahy Health Department worked to prevent illuminating gas poisoning by seepage from leaky street mains, devised a program for filtration of drinking water in public schools, worked to control milk distribution, and closed unsanitary tenements. That same year, a licensed plumber was appointed plumbing and sanitary inspector, and a health inspector was appointed “for abatement of fly breeding nuisances.”

By 1946, the Sanitary Inspector duties were combined with the Plumbing Inspector and included the duties of Sealer of Weights and Measures. Routine inspections of grocery and meat markets as well as bakeries, shipper farms, egg dealers and restaurants were completed. Over time, these businesses



were inspected and licensed by the Wisconsin Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Protection. The inspection of Weights and Measures also was turned over to the Wisconsin Department of Health.

With an increase in the number of environmental health concerns and a decreasing state budget, the Health Officers of Cudahy, South Milwaukee and St. Francis united to form an Environmental Health Consortium in 2001. The three Health Departments applied for and received a state grant to hire a local Environmental Health Specialist who dealt with environmental problems within those communities. Over the next three years, local ordinances were changed and approval from the Wisconsin Department of Health and from the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Protection were obtained.

Today, a qualified Environmental Health Specialist inspects all Cudahy restaurants, stores that sell foodstuffs, swimming pools, school food services, hotels, motels and rooming houses. He also investigates all City of Cudahy human health hazards, animal bites, cases of lead poisoning, and food and waterborne illness. Cudahy now can respond to local environmental concerns rapidly.

Since 1956, volunteers extended some of the non-professional services of the Cudahy Health Department into the community. Over the years, volunteers assisted in clinic activities, performed height, weight, vision and hearing screenings at the schools, assisted in pre-school registrations, did registrations and screening activities in adult health clinics, and assisted in the delivery of influenza clinics. As the functions of the Health Department changed, so did the need for our volunteers. The Health Department no longer has the large contingency of volunteers that we had in the past. However, we treasure and appreciate the selfless efforts of our volunteers. These volunteers have contributed to making our community a better place in which to live.



*At left:*

*Right Row, Front to Rear:*

**Joyce Graham, Carol Halverson, Tillie Greenemeir Jost, Elsie Teschner, Florence Nagel**

*Left Row, Front to Rear:*

**Florence Mueller, Elsie Churchill, Dorothy Merlin, Ruth Last, Sidney Frellwitz**

The Hospital Lending Service originated from the Arthur Kerlin Post #16 of the American Legion and the Cudahy/St. Francis Kiwanis Club through the efforts of the late George Grubis, who called it “common sense, not charity.” In 1952, a need for this type of community service was identified and the program continues to this day. The actual management of this program is primarily the function of the Cudahy Health Department, with the Kiwanis Club providing for the maintenance of the lending equipment. This program provides free, short-term loans of a variety of hospital equipment to any



Cudahy or St. Francis resident. Over the last 54 years, over 200 pieces of equipment have been loaned out annually.

Over the past 110 years, the staff of the Cudahy Health Department has functioned tirelessly to assure that the citizens of this community achieve their highest level of well-being. The Health Department's vision for Cudahy is "strong families, in safe neighborhoods, with access to affordable health care." In retrospect, that is what this Department has tried to accomplish through the years. Cudahy citizens can be assured that their Health Department will continue to attempt to protect them from all types of public health hazards in the future.



**Carol Wantuch, Public Health Officer, 2005**



**Cudahy Health Department Staff, 2005**

*Back Row, Left to Right:* Ed Wrench, Grant Coordinator; Carol Wantuch, , Health Officer;  
Annette Schmidt, PHN; Martin Zabkiewicz, Environmental Health Specialist

*Front Row, Left to Right:* Mary Juleen, PHN; Linda Lindsey, Health Department Clerk; Cheryl Orlando, PHN